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Transgenres and the plane of language, species, and evolution

The humanist discourse of species will always be available for use by some humans against other humans as well, to countenance violence against the social other of whatever *species*—or *gender*, or *race*, or *class*, or *sexual difference*... We all, human and nonhuman alike, have a stake in the discourse and institution of speciesism; it is by no means limited to its overwhelmingly direct and disproportionate effects on animals. (Cary Wolfe 2003:8)¹



LET'S FACE IT: we are at a theoretical impasse. Feminist and queer theorists have been spinning their cognitive wheels for a long time over the role, value, meaning, and implications of the notions of sex and gender but, to date, have not arrived at any sort of definitive theoretical stance toward either of them individually or both taken together. On the contrary, the debates seem to be deepening and theorists seem to be digging in their heels. On the one hand, this could be a sign that we still have work to do, that with enough interrogation and deliberation we will finally arrive at a conclusive account of these concepts. On the other hand, it could indicate that we have been asking the wrong questions. I am going to take up the latter view under the guise that perhaps we have been misled into



thinking that examining and refiguring the sex/gender distinction would provide an answer, or at least is the best strategy for escaping gendered or sexed oppressions. While I do not pretend that I will resolve this impasse, I hope to suggest a change of focus, a new avenue to explore, one that I hope might produce some new lines of analysis to help guide us out of the impasse.²



Following Wolfe's claim above, we can say that one of the primary problems with the approach that situates further study of sex/gender as the answer, is that in its current form the debate reifies the logic of humanism in its linkage of biological sex to the natural/animal. Further, it remains squarely in the domain of the human or so-called higher animals insofar as the very issue of sexual difference and, for that matter, gender, pertains only to a tiny subset of existing species. In effect, the insistence on, and persistence of, discussions of sex/gender, in the precise way we have continued to do this, reproduces human exceptionalism (and its counterpart speciesism) and, thus, upholds humanism in general. As Luciana Parisi claims: "The historical project of humanism starts with the constitution of gender and sex as objects of study, the reproduction of the problem of genesis and origin." (Parisi 2004:34) As we thus unravel the threads constituting the fabric of humanism, we realize the extent to which sex and gender issues are always already essentially entangled in both the distinction between humans and animals and the constitution of the human subject.

This emphasis on sex/gender and sexual difference, however, is a crucial chauvinistic error. As Myra Hird informs us, "human bodies are constantly engaged in reproduction and only sometimes (and for a short time) engaged in specifically 'sexual' reproduction. The networks of bacteria, microbes, molecules and inorganic life which exist beneath the surface of our skin take little account of 'sexual'



difference and indeed exist and reproduce without any recourse to what we think of as reproduction.” (Hird 2002:94) In fact, the vast majority of earthly organic life employs non-sexual means of reproduction. Accordingly, privileging sexual reproduction as we do in debates around sexual and gender difference, keeps us firmly rooted in relatively humanistic modes of analysis. Not only is this a mistake inasmuch as it deploys the “master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde 1984:110) by setting up or reproducing an oppressive hierarchy of some forms of organic life over others in its effort to undermine the oppressive sex/gender hierarchy (a mere iteration of the same logic undergirding sexism), but also it is in itself internally contradictory to feminist goals to maintain humanism. This last point may not be immediately obvious. By it, I am claiming that upholding humanism is logically contradictory to feminist purposes and aims, because humanism itself is one of the primary theoretical forces generating the sex- and genderism that feminist theory is meant to undermine. Thus, by perpetuating humanism and its inherent speciesism, feminists will fail to disrupt the very premises and binary logics that buttress the paradigms they intend to overthrow. Accordingly, should we manage to uncover methods for thinking outside the proverbial humanistic box, we might discover that our current notions of sex/gender are more provincial than we at present consider them to be.



I am often asked why I think that doing post- or transhuman theory can be considered a queerfeminist project.³ The above is my answer. That is to say that I contend that without a thoroughgoing repudiation of humanism, there is little chance that any form of feminism can reach its goals. For, so long as humanism and its (falsely) binaristic couplings of mind-body, man-woman, human-animal, culture-nature, reason-emotion/instinct, (i.e. norm-deviance) etc.



remain even partly in tact, there is scant hope of overcoming any single binary. They are all intertwined and mutually interdependent categories and based on the same logic of norm-deviance. In light of Wolfe's reticulation of speciesism, sexism, racism, and classism, above, we need to take on the legion of dualisms generated by speciesism if we are to accomplish any of the individual, or perhaps *intervidual*, or co-constituted and co-emerging, dichotomies.⁴



So what might be done to extricate us from this impasse and more fundamentally achieve the goals (and ultimate obsolescence) of feminism? While I think there are many important pieces of the strategic puzzle, the piece I will spotlight here is *transgenre*. My objective is to suggest a new way to reconceptualize contemporary notions of gender in light of a semantic play on the French translation of the English *transgender* as *transgenre*.⁵ As we will see, genre provides us with a more expansive analytic scope than gender and propels the discussion of it into the register of multiplicity, affect, and force, as well as the transhuman feminist strategy of *becoming-imperceptible*. Becoming-imperceptible is a process of dehumanization, an anti-humanist praxis linked to a repudiation of identity politics found in the collaborative work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In a nutshell, the movement toward becoming-imperceptible is an effort to shed the dominant conceptions, identities, and organization of the human and the body. To fully become-imperceptible, we must engage in a process of multiple becomings-other whereby, with each becoming, both the category and its assumed members are permanently transformed.

At first blush, *transgenre* seems to be a mere replica of the English word *transgender* into the French language. However, ontologically it is more pregnant with possibility than the word *transgender*. I find in this term a useful way of understanding, and perhaps transcen-



ding, the theoretical stalemate around the term gender, providing us with greater explanatory power to extricate us from marginalized feminist debates around sex/gender and sexual difference. This analysis has the beneficial side effect of situating queerfeminist theory as central to the repudiation of Enlightenment Humanism and to ontological study and philosophy proper, liberating it from the ghetto of feminist studies. This multiply reflexive, multi-lingual, multi-disciplinary, and evolutionary translation project takes up transhuman insights and embeds them into the discourse of a formerly limited notion of gender. Doing so allows for the possibility of what we have come to know as gender expanding its range, becoming more fluid and multivalent, and, thus, inclusive of those who typically function as proof of the limitations of gender and identity politics. It also can help to provide enhanced and more accurate accounts of issues addressed within sex/gender debates, in the debate around the ontology of sexual difference, and possibly even in other domains such as: intersectionality, race, and ethnicity (which I will not have the space to flesh out here).

In a sense, the description I will provide in the forthcoming can be characterized as an argument in favor of gender extinction under the larger project of human extinction entailed by the refutation of humanism. Insofar as sex/gender is inextricably bound to human intelligibility and humanness under the aegis of humanist theory, if we are to get beyond humanism once and for all, we must also relinquish our claims to and emphasis on sex/gender. In other words, the death of (hu)Man and its concomitant death of the subject must include the end of sex/gender and sexual difference as we know it. While this may be seen as the collateral damage of moving to transgenre, my aim here is descriptive, not prescriptive – I am not advocating that we simply jettison the concept of gender wholesale





or without reason. Rather, the hope is that transgenre will supplement the decades of analysis and theorizing that brought us to the point of this impasse by pushing that work to a new level and, as the linguistic evolution below will show, continue to be at least partly constituted by the linguistic genetic history of that essential work.

Language, species, and evolution

Because of the multi-linguistic and multi-disciplinary nature of the term *genre*, the next section of this paper will map the matrix of terms constituting the semantic genetic code of genre and the, “vestiges that inscribe [its] present form with the traces of [its] past, living forms of memory.” (Grosz 2004:30) Before that, however, we must spin the conceptual web linking language, evolution, and species. The juxtaposition between language and evolution is not at all accidental. The development of the anatomical and cognitive apparatuses necessary to be capable of linguistic communication is alleged to be what makes complex organisms like humans superior to other species according to teleological versions of evolutionary theory. But this is not the only relationship worthy highlighting.



According to Elizabeth Grosz’s read of Charles Darwin, “the development of language is not just *like* evolution, it *is* evolution,” (Grosz 2004:29) and “[t]he same problems regarding the origin of species face any account of the origin of languages, and the same inherent indeterminacy regarding the unit of analysis—the word, the sentence, the text, a dialect, a language—haunts linguistics as it does biology.” (Grosz 2004:27) Languages, like species and organisms, are polysemous and multiple when we dig beneath the surface. All are also vulnerable to mutation as a result of pressures from outside forces in such a way that speciation and linguistic evolution often result in a product containing the vestiges of the combined



history of those forces and pressures. My suggestion to shift from gender to genre is, hence, aligned with Grosz's reflection that, "Like species, languages face two kinds of pressure from the forces of natural selection: a pressure from the force of competition between terms within a given language, which leads to the abandonment of some terms and the elevation of others [...] and a pressure from the force of other languages." (Grosz 2004:30–31) Seen through this lens, I propose that we understand gender as subjected to both forms of pressure; the objective of deposing gender in favor of genre arises out of both the tension between gender and genre in English and the various transactions between French and English around the term genre.



In line with the desire to undermine various forms of humanism, language should perhaps, in turn, be dethroned of its privileged and hegemonic status as the benchmark of human nature. For, only when language is thus desituated can we come to realize our full ontological scope, since continuing to underscore language as the *sine qua non*, or sufficient criterion, of human being preserves the false dichotomy between humans and so-called animals sustained by enlightenment humanism. Even Luce Irigaray, founder and tireless supporter of sexual difference theory, remarks that, "If we don't invent a language, if we don't find our body's language, it will have too few gestures to accompany our story." (Irigaray 1985:214) And, since the story we aim to tell is far richer and more expansive than that which has been heretofore narrated through the tropes of sex and gender, exerting pressure on our existing language and exposing some of its veiled meanings and historical residues (Grosz 2004:30) might spark the needed theoretical innovation to move us beyond humanism.

To do so, however, it is imperative to deepen our interrogation of





the interrelationships between species, animality, and language by understanding what we mean when we evoke the term human. For, as Akira Mizuta Lippit astutely discerns, “At precisely the moment when the bond between humanity and animal came to be seen as broken, humanity became a subject and the animal its reflection.” (Lippit 2000:19) Following Lippit (and a plethora of other theorists)⁶, we can say that the concept “human” has been a relatively modern construction, one that relies on a clear contraposition to what is deemed to be animal. But, as Nietzsche forewarned, this was the great error of the arrogant modern man (Nietzsche 1974:115). In consigning animality to the margins of ontology, those marking the boundaries of humanity, the Enlightenment project in effect gave birth to the animal as “not-human.” This hegemonic boundary delimitation is but an arrogant ruse inasmuch as the human-animal distinction, from which we generate the very concept human, is asymmetrical. Animal is a heterogeneous plurality, referring to a plethora of immeasurably diverse beings of nearly unfathomable variety, whereas human is meant to refer to one specific species that somehow stands above and beyond all those incalculable others. Making use of the term animal thus serves to recodify an evolutionarily teleological human supremacy; it slyly defines a mythical norm against which all other beings are measured and deemed other.

It is for this reason that Jacques Derrida calls the term “animal,” “the single feature of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity.” (Derrida 2004:125) He offers the neologism *animot* in an effort to circumvent and redress this problem. In French, the plural of animal is *animaux*, and *animot* is its homophone. The latter is intended to marry the plural notion of animal with *mot*, or “word” in French, evoking the sense in which animal has heretofore been merely a discursive entity. He argues that primarily, “it is a matter





of taking into account a multiplicity of heterogeneous structures and limits,” since, “[a]mong non-humans...there is an immense multiplicity of other living things that cannot in any way be homogenized, except by means of violence and willful ignorance, within the category of what is called the animal or animality in general.” (Derrida 2004:125 f) Although Charles Darwin made strides in undermining Promethean and Enlightenment humanistic values by unhinging the door hastily erected between man and beast, the view of the autonomous human subject sharply contrasted to animality (read as a unified other), and the reductive homogenizing violence enacted upon the non-human animal world, has continued to hold sway up to the present. Given that picture, it would be difficult to argue with Giorgio Agamben’s pronouncement of a fundamental zoopolitics: that the bisection of animality from humanity is “the decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict.”⁷ (Agamben 2004:80)

Perhaps it is time now to place species under the semantic microscope, as doing so might bring additional molecular connections into relief. Donna Haraway, in an etymological analysis resonant with the one I am performing here, writes that for *species*, “The Latin *specere* is at the root of things [...] with its tones of ‘to look’ and ‘to behold,’” and that species relates “both to the relentlessly ‘specific’ or particular and to a class of individuals with the same characteristics, *species* contains its own opposite [...] Species is about the dance linking kin and kind. The ability to interbreed reproductively is the rough and ready requirement for members of the same biological species; all those lateral gene exchangers such as bacteria have never made very good species.” (Haraway 2008:17) There are several key premises here: (1) that taxonomizing species is based on an assumption of the ability of members of the same species to be capable



of successful sexual reproduction, in other words, sexual difference, which links species back to the issue of sex and gender at the heart of the present study, (2) that species paradoxically involves both the specific and the general, which encapsulates one of the features of genre underlined by Derrida when he claims that, “the law of the law of genre [...] is precisely a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy [...] a sort of participation without belonging – a taking part in without being part of, without having membership,” (Derrida 1980:59) and (3) that bacteria, as not sexually reproducing, are outside the realm of classification, are not species, which offers both yet another boundary-marker in the humanistic paradigm and the possibility of a new archetype for the “unseen” or imperceptible. This parallels Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari who submit, in speaking about science fiction, that the genre “has gone through a whole evolution taking it from animal, vegetable and mineral, becomings to becomings of bacteria, viruses, molecules, and things imperceptible.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:248)

A final point about species made by Haraway seems relevant to mention. She explains that, “the word *species* also structures conservation and environmental discourses, with their ‘endangered species’ that function simultaneously to locate value and to evoke death and extinction in ways familiar in colonial representations of the always vanishing indigene. The discursive tie between the colonized, the enslaved, the noncitizen, and the animal – all reduced to type, all Others to rational man, and all essential to his bright constitution – is at the heart of racism and flourishes, lethally, in the entrails of humanism.” (Haraway 2008:18) These discursive ties are also present in the progress narratives undergirding teleological interpretations of evolutionary theory and in the call to arms against speciesism Wolfe makes in the epigraph foregrounding the



present study. The reduction to type that Haraway finds dwelling in the bowels of humanism is the very homogenizing violence we heard echoed in Derrida, only expanded beyond the literal animal. Moreover, these constitute some of the becomings-other (such as: woman, animal, black, and jew) found among the multiplicity of Deleuzo-Guattarian minoritarian, molecular becomings plotted along the line of flight toward becoming-imperceptible (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:291). Interesting to highlight, too, is that *type* translates from the English into French as: type, genre, espèce (species). Thus, the types Haraway describes, the Others, are also species – inextricably tied to their animality – and genres in several senses we will soon parse out; once again this both infolds species with genre and situates those types as boundary-marking others, like animals, to the humanist myth of Man.

As such we see that language, species, and evolution are all interconnected in essential ways. And this provides some of the vital groundwork for the larger argument about the ways in which genre might be better suited for undertaking a non-anthropocentric and transhumanist analysis than gender. It is, indeed, the forces and vibrations between terms – terms already embedded in the genetic history of gender and genre – that make genre a compelling proxy for gender, as we will now continue to establish in the next section.

Etymological genetics: genre, gender, genus, and generic



In this section, I will provide a glossary that traces the etymological roots of the word genre and illustrate how understanding its evolution exposes the interrelations of gender with literature and film, science, evolution, sex/gender, and species. This section is not meant as *the* definitive etymology but a genealogy in a Nietzschean and Foucauldian fashion.



I. GENRE



The word *genre*, in English, derives from the Latin *genus* via the French *genre* and is connected to terms like *gender* and *generic*. What is most vital to this study is the fact that, in French, *genre* has a much more extensive semantic breadth than it does in English. In French, *genre* signifies: grammatical gender – the property nouns have for being feminine, masculine, or neuter; the scientific classification of groups of species into a family – what we call in English a *genus*; kind, type, sort, species; loose class or category; nature; and style or form. We will return to this in a moment but not before mentioning the significance of *genre* that this study will not address in detail: the sense in both French and English that is confined to the arts, particularly literature and film. While this sense should only remain in the background, there are several key resonances embedded in it that we can incorporate into our theory of *genre*.

First, genres in the arts are vague, lacking strict boundaries, understood by reference to disciplinary conventions, and frequently works overlap, or draw simultaneously from, multiple genres. Second, genres are unfaithful citational practices, impregnated with the declassification of the classification itself, always constituted by their own potential failure as part of the accepted convention. As Réda Bensmaïa explains, Deleuze and Guattari argue that there has been a widespread misinterpretation of Kafka's work: "because one is driven to 'categorize' it – it] leads precisely to failure: an always excessive reduction," (Bensmaïa 1986:xvi) which can be similarly applied here to *genre*. Finally, the conventional agreements allow genres to function less like essences than like Ludwig Wittgenstein's "family resemblances." (Wittgenstein 1968:§67) Though Wittgenstein's paradigm case is that of games, his intention is to have us disavow the Platonic theory of language according to which language and the



significance of words possess an eternal essence. Instead, he argues, “that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, – but that they are related to one another in many different ways.” (Wittgenstein 1968:§65) He continues that, “if you look at them you will not see something that is common to them at all, but similarities, relationships [...] the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing.” (Wittgenstein 1968:§66) Transposing this concept to the domain of genre seems apt, especially given the family lineage and resemblance to terms like genus, generic, and gender we will explore below. It is this very family resemblance, in fact, that produced the translation of transgender into French as *transgenre*.

Film theorist Linda Williams coined the term *body genres* (Williams 1991:2–13) to denote the sense in which certain genres of film such as horror, melodrama, and pornography have an affect on the spectator’s body such that the body reacts physically, affectively, and emotionally to the events taking place on screen. In a humanistic privileging of mind over body, she deems body genres subordinate to those genres that captivate the intellect – the classic high and low art distinction is mirrored in this hierarchy. I find the motif of body genres enticing in relation to the position I am presenting here, though clearly it must be readapted for our purposes such that we enucleate its humanistic core. So re-narrating the concept of body genres entails grafting genres onto bodies in the guise of disrupting the role that gender plays in making bodies, and humans, intelligible – thus reframing the body as *genred* rather than gendered. This approach impugns the hegemonic position of gender and supplants it with an alternative that is affective: open to possibility, contradiction, reinterpretation, flux, multiplicity, and forces. Body





genres thus characterized participate in assemblages that, in their unfaithful relationship to categorization and belonging and in their imbricated family resemblances, align with a Deleuzo-Guattarian becoming-imperceptible rather than a politics of visibility, recognition, and identity. The notion of body genres rendered affectively in this manner galvanizes and accelerates the potentialities already virtually present in the linguistic genetic history of gender/genre.

It is, however, the linkages to gender, genus, and generic that are most essential here. Each of these will be addressed in turn in the subsequent subsections.

2. GENDER



Since Simone de Beauvoir first disentangled the phenomeno-cultural concept of gender from the facticity of biological sex – what she called biological and social sex – *sex* has been used to refer to the biological, anatomical, morphological differences between males and females and is still commonly thought to be binary and immutable (despite a wealth of scholarship on intersex and trans). Gender has come to name de Beauvoir’s social sex and has, thus, been deployed to refer to the socio-cultural identity category, set of traits or behaviors, or perception of women and men and the performance of femininity and masculinity with their associated traits often understood as constructed or fluid. This dichotomy dismantled the notion that women’s status and oppression were based on an assumed biological facticity and overturned the Freudian notion that anatomy is destiny. It also presented a formidable challenge to contemporary arguments that even now continue to justify women’s subordination on the basis of a linkage between nature/animality and biological functions such as reproduction. The hierarchies of the natural and cultural, animal and human, and woman and man embedded in



humanistic discourse are, hence, as inextricably interconnected.

This distinction between sex and gender has been challenged in recent years by a variety of theorists. On one side, theorists like Luce Irigaray collapses gender into sex, arguing that sexual difference which has yet to come is the fundamental ontological difference of human being through which all other differences are generated. On the other side of the spectrum, theorists such as Judith Butler reduces sex to a mere effect of a performatively established gender in claiming that sex, “is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time [...] not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize ‘sex’ and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms.” (Butler 1993:2) Moreover, the very architecture of the sex/gender distinction has been called into question both by natural scientists and medical professionals who destabilize the immutability of an assumed “natural” sex and its presumed binary essence and feminists who contest the purely socio-cultural inscription of gender by returning to questions both corporeal and material. I am not interested in continuing this debate or, for that matter, closing ranks with one side or the other. Rather, I would like to propose transgenre as a new method of analysis that might help us not only to step outside of the fray but also produce novel understandings and offer potential for creative theoretical lines hitherto impeded by the sex/gender stalemate.

Returning to the roots of the word gender lands us back in the domain of the Latin languages. It is etymologically traced back to the Latin root *genus* (interestingly, in Swedish academic contexts, gender is translated as *genus*, though gender is more commonly known as *kön*), and the French *genre*. In Latin languages, *gender* refers to a linguistic function of the language that classifies nouns





according to whether they are feminine, masculine, or neutral and dictates agreement with pronouns, articles, adjectives, and sometimes verbs. Often this is arbitrary, though sometimes it is linked to the sex of the referent. Relevant here is that, often in those languages, expressing the meaning of gender in its Anglo sense involves using a modifier like *social* added to the word sex, thus in a certain way collapsing sex and gender into sex. This would be the inverse of the Butlerian schema, though consistent with the hegemonic view of gender that links it to the social expression of biological sex. This issue is also pertinent to this discussion insofar as it reflects the need to attend to matters of language, classification, and agreement. It also indicates what gets left out: the neutral or, we could say, generic – an issue that will become relevant below.

3. GENUS

Genre and gender, as explained above, both originate from the Latin *genus*, meaning: descent, family, type, and gender. *Genus*, as we know from the Linnaean system of classification, is a category used in the taxonomy of both fossils and existing organic organisms. The taxonomic ranks in order of the most general to the most specific (in both senses of the word) are: life, domain, kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species. It is in the transatlantic semantic volley of genus that we can patently see the relationship between genus, gender, and genre: in French, genus translates as genre and, as we have established, genre in French also means gender (at least with respect to language).



Another matter that bears interjecting at this stage is that *homo sapiens*, also known as the human genus and species, is, on an admittedly unorthodox interpretation, actually only a genus and not a species at all. Given that humans are the sole remaining *homo*'s in



the genus, all other species of which are extinct, the *sapiens* reads as extraneous – save its ability to demarcate contemporary humans from our ancestors. Furthermore, this issue arouses discussions of genocide and extinction, as *genocide* also descends from genus and its Greek cognate *genos*, meaning race or kin. One way to articulate the difference between genocide and extinction then is to understand genocide as the eradication of a genus (humans) and extinction as the annihilation of a species (non-humans and those deemed Other – recall Haraway). This lens brings into stark relief the extent to which the human–animal divide is ingrained in, and perpetuated through, our inherited linguistic genes and confirms, to some degree, Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s claim that, “Man is a historical idea and not a natural species.” (Merleau-Ponty 2003:198) But what if we were to think about extinction with respect to humans? Could this dismantle some of the supremacy inherent in humanism? Would our notion of ethico-politics be fundamentally altered?⁸



4. GENERIC

It is this final connection to *generic* that propels genre beyond gender in terms of its potential for critical purchase. In English, the word generic has several meanings: referring to a general, unspecific kind, class, or group; lacking distinct or unique characteristics; and without a brand name. These tropes resonate with motifs constituting the nature of literary and filmic genre above. Furthermore, generic can also be used as an adjective modifying words in reference either to a taxonomic genus or a genre. The latter adjectival sense mingled with the lack of specificity and distinctiveness is precisely the interpretive openness I am striving to affect with both the notion of body genres and the shift from transgender to transgenre. It is the dissonance between these *faux amis*, found here in the speci-



ficity and humanistic identity politics of one and the generality and politics of imperceptibility of the other, that generates the very force that provides merit to the linguistic evolution proposed here. Being generic in this sense implies a kind of participation without belonging, a membership in a category that lacks anything distinguishable, a non-identity identity, an affective vulnerability to overlapping and paradoxical forces, and always already incorporated with potential failure, contradiction, disobedience, and unfaithfulness. As Lauren Berlant explains, “Even the prospects of failure that haunt the performance of identity and genre are conventional [...] generic performance always involves moments of potential collapse [...] [as] *part* of the convention.” (Berlant 2008:4)



Additionally, Deleuze and Guattari argue that, “minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986:16) Transposing this into the language of the present study, the impulse is found in the reclamation of a minor signification within a major conceptual schema of several major languages. Despite the fact that their analysis is intended for a specific genre, we can extrapolate this onto the semantic evolution presented here, since moving from gender to genre parallels the threefold nature of minor literature they depict as, “the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986:18) The evolution to genre similarly aims to unhinge and re-code the interpolations enacted by the major language through injecting a minor conceptual transformation; is, following Wolfe and others, intimately tied to a political praxis; and, in its generic form, is de-individuated or intervidual. With the matrix of species, language, evolution, etymology and linguistic genetics, the myth of the



human subject, genus, gender, and generic as the backdrop, genre performs the absolute destratification of the *cogito* that Deleuze and Guattari endorse with the process of becoming-imperceptible.

A quick sidebar on the addition of the prefix *trans-* to genre is warranted: I have been using transgenre and genre to some extent interchangeably throughout this paper. The original motivation for this paper arose, as I stated, from the rapport between transgenre and transgender. Most of the argument here has been focused on genre all but eliding the issue of trans.⁹ The appending of genre with *trans-*, however, is important in a number of respects: (1) it evokes the sense in which a Deleuzo-Guattarian body without organs (BwO), “is produced as a whole, but in its own particular place within the process of production, alongside the parts that it neither unifies nor totalizes” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983:43) and the sense in which BwO, becomings, and assemblages are “intersected by breaks in the signifying chains,” (Ibid.) and made up of, “transverse connections, inclusive disjunctions, and polyvocal conjunctions, thereby producing selections, detachments, and remainders, with a transference of individuality, in a generalized schizogenesis.” (Ibid:287) Transversal praxis is thus typified by a refusal to crystallize into identifiable forms even if, almost paradoxically, consistency can be achieved. A plane of consistency, however, is a flow that assembles heterogeneities but does not impose an organization upon them; (2) it meshes with the notion of transhuman and the repudiation of humanism; (3) in translation, it reflects the notion of transgender, which retains the interconnection with the problematics central to feminist, gender, and queer theory; and (4) it references a transversal politics, one of “rooting and shifting” (Yuval-Davis 1999:94–98) captured in the inherited linguistic genetics of genre.¹⁰

Thus, it is in that generic vein that I wish to transplant genre onto





bodies in the core of identity where gender is currently situated. I venture that this project is a maneuver not only out of the speciesist, heteronormative, and oedipal paradigms plaguing post-Enlightenment understandings of gender but also away from the humanistic blueprint that erects a host of egregiously oppressive dualisms onto the contemporary western socio-political landscape.

Conclusions



Humanity's true moral test, its fundamental test (which lies deeply buried from view), consists of its attitude towards those who are at its mercy: animals. And in this respect humankind has suffered a fundamental debacle, a debacle so fundamental that all others stem from it. (Milan Kundera 1999:150)

Before we descend completely into the rabbit hole, let us take stock of the foregoing analysis. First, we discussed the tangled web of language, evolution, and species, determining that, "both biology and language are systems of reproduction with minor variation, where the degree of difference from the 'parental' forms, living or linguistic, marks any variation or innovation," and "species and languages retain both a certain family resemblance to and a certain degree of difference from their parental forms. The resemblance between languages and the development of species is not [...] random or contingent," but "part of the processes of natural selection [and] subject to the same evolutionary pressures." (Grosz 2004:27 f) Then we engaged in a genealogy of the term *genre* excavating its genetic legacy and family resemblances with terms like gender, genus, and generic. Here I underscored the ways in which there is an assemblage of forces at



work under the surface of genre, once we map its linguistic genome. And this mapping reveals its analytic potential insofar as it exposes genre as contaminated, impure, hybrid, unspecific, internally contradictory, multiple, polysemous, and open – a virtual stem cell in the science of identity. So where does that leave us?

The objective here was not only to parse out the ways in which humanism is inscribed with a human–animal distinction that has illegitimately and chauvinistically held sway, and to critique the ways in which privileging a sex/gender analysis reinforces that divide, but also to transform the framework of our analysis such that we might also have an affect on the status and nature of socio-political arrangements. In line with Wolfe, we can now fully grasp that humanism’s intrinsic speciesism casts a wide net. In other words, endorsing Wolfe, Agamben, and Kundera above, we can argue that the point of this analysis is to ultimately address some of the fundamental struggles of our age: the zoopolitical and zooethical, which are founded on erroneous notions of human identity and purity. It is the issue of indeterminacy and multiplicity that is at the core of my rationale for wanting to reconfigure the nature of the debate about sex and gender by using the term genre. I see this as an onto-epistemological shift that incorporates the conceptual genetic legacy of gender while simultaneously opening up new lines of flight away from humanism’s reductive cleaving of the human from “the rest” and toward becoming-imperceptible. Likewise, zoopolitics and zooethics involve an acknowledgement of an inevitable vulnerability, openness, interdependency, and interindividuality, an affective relation with the world and entities in it, rather than a fabricated severance of self from the other. As Lauren Berlant explains, it is “adopting a more elaborate respect for genres of self-recognition, belonging, or being with ourselves in proximity to the other *that already exists*.”



(Berlant 2010) It is not, for example, about treating animals, or the manifold others, *humanely*. For, how can we escape human exceptionalism when the word itself contains the human seed? It is about being, as Haraway names it, “messmates, companion species, and significant others to one another,” (Haraway 2008:15) and ultimately, for us humans, becoming-species.

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NOTES

1 Italics mine.

2 In (forthcoming): "Transgenres and the plane of gender imperceptibility," in



Critical lines, feminist flights: mobilizing future concepts, bodies and subjectivities in feminist thought and practice, Gunkel, Henriette, Nigianni, Chrysanthi, and Söderbäck, Fanny, eds., New York, instead of addressing language, evolution, and species, I examine the aspects of transgenre that apply to trans and gender studies issues, and to the question of imperceptibility. I do not see these as separate analyses, as should be clear from the epigraph. As such, I would have liked to have called these two articles Part I and Part II and it might be helpful to read these two pieces in tandem.

3 In latin *trans* means across, beyond, through; and *post* signifies after in time or space/behind, after-often in reaction/rejection/response to that which came before it. I have a preference for the idea of crossings over the implication that we are, or somehow could ever be, post-human.

4 I borrow this term from Miller, Andrew: “Pan: orientation” at: <http://thereturnofpan.tumblr.com/> (Pan’s e-book). In his work, interviduality reflects the notion that there is an inevitable and essential interdependence at the core of the individual. While I am using the term more generally to capture the notion of interdependency, Miller intended it to apply only to sentient beings. As Christian de Quincey characterized it as, “*Subjectivity* is fundamentally *inter-subjectivity*. We are not so much ‘individuals’ as *interviduals*. We co-create each other.” (see: Pan’s e-book) I am thus expanding its use beyond interpersonal or intra-organic relations, to concepts as well.

5 As I have explained elsewhere (see: Weinstein, “Transgenres and the plane of gender imperceptibility”), this pairing constitute a set of “faux amis” or fake friends – words in different languages that are similar in spelling and sound, but significantly different in terms of meaning. It is from this pairing of transgender and transgenre, faux amis, that the inspiration for this paper was generated.

6 See for example: Nietzsche, Friedrich (1974): *The gay science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York.; Horkheimer, Max and Adorno, Theodor W. (1988): *Dialectic of enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, New York.; Foucault, Michel (1973): *The order of things: an archaeology of the human sciences*. A translation of les

mots et les choses, Ed. Laing, R.D. New York.

7 I borrow this term and Agamben reference from the special session on “Zoopolitics” organized by Alastair Hunt as part of the Modern Language Association’s Annual Convention, January 2012 (for which I am the commentator).

8 I will chronicle this analysis in more detail in a forthcoming article entitled: “Blaspheming life: toward an inhuman ethico-politics” in a volume tentatively entitled *Against life* (eds. Alastair Hunt and Stephanie Youngblood) generated from a panel at the American Comparative Literature Association of the same name held in February 2011 (forthcoming 2012).



9 For a more thorough analysis of this, see: Weinstein “Transgenres and the plane of gender imperceptibility.”

10 Nira Yuval-Davis argues that “rooting and shifting” is: “the idea [...] that each [...] participant in a political dialogue, would bring with them the reflexive knowledge of their own positioning and identity. This is the ‘rooting.’ At the same time, they should also try to ‘shift’—to put themselves in the situation of those with whom they are in dialogue and who are different,” (Yuval-Davis 1999:96). This gels with the Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts of deterritorialization and imperceptibility endorsed here.

SAMMANFATTNING

Transgenrer och språkets, arternas och evolutionens plan

Jag har två syften med denna artikel. Det första är att lyfta fram ett nytt sätt att konceptualisera samtida föreställningar om kön/genus (“sex”/”gender”) utifrån en semantisk lek med den franska översättningen av det engelska uttrycket ”transgender” som ”transgenre”. För att bättre kunna förstå implikationerna genomför jag en genealogi av begreppet ”genre”, och gräver fram dess genetiska arv och släktlikhet med ord som ”gender”, ”genus” och ”generic”. Detta tydliggör hur en sammansättning av krafter verkar under ytan på genre, när vi väl kartlagt dess lingvistiska genom. Och denna kartläggning visar dess analytiska



potential i den mening att den avslöjar genre som kontaminerad, oren, hybrid, ospecifik, fylld av inre motsägelser, mångsidig, polysemisk och öppen – en veritabel stamcell i identitetsforskningen. Förhoppningen är att transgenre skall komma att komplettera årtiondens analyser och teoretiserande kring kön/genus genom att föra över arbetet till ett nytt register.

För det andra visar jag att genre ger oss en större analytisk räckvidd än genus och flyttar diskussionen såväl till multiplicitet, affekt och kraftens register, som till den transmänniska ("transhuman"), feministiska strategin "omärklig-blivande" ("becoming-imperceptible"). Omärklig-blivande är den process genom vilken vi gör oss av med förhärskande begrepp, identiteter och organisering av det mänskliga och av kroppen. För att synliggöra några av denna övergångs implikationer behandlar denna artikel det tilltrasslade nätet av språk, evolution och arter.

Det slutliga målet är inte bara att frilägga hur humanismen präglas av det särskiljande mellan människa och djur som orättmätigt och chauvinistiskt har varit förhärskande, och att kritisera hur privilegierandet av kön/genus-analyser förstärker den gränsdragningen, utan också att förvandla tolkningsramen för vår analys så att vi kan ha en påverkan på sociopolitiska arrangemangs status och karaktär. Humanismens inneboende speciesism sträcker sig långt. När detta väl har klarlagts, kan vi hävda att avsikten med denna analys i slutändan är att behandla några av vår tids fundamentala strider: den zoopolitiska och zooetiska, vilka grundas på oriktiga föreställningar om mänsklig identitet och renhet.

Nyckelord: Transgenre, arter, evolution, genus, genre

Keywords: Transgenre, species, evolution, gender, genre